
Brief notes on the birds of Mount Inago, northern Mozambique

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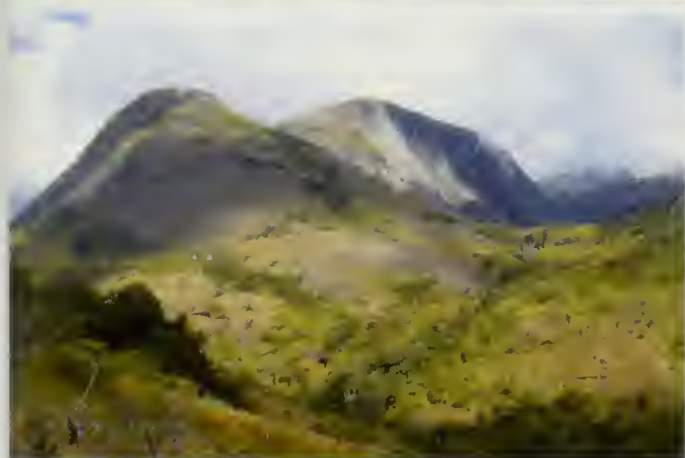
Notes sur les oiseaux du Mont Inago, Mozambique du nord. Cet article présente les principaux résultats du premier inventaire ornithologique du Mont Inago, au nord du Mozambique, qui a eu lieu du 4 au 13 mai 2009. Ce massif, situé à 50 km au nord-est du Mont Namuli, atteint une hauteur de plus de 1.800 m. Au total, 101 espèces ont été observées, dont 86 dans le massif et le reste dans les environs. Les plus importantes étaient l'Alêthe de Cholo *Alethe choloensis* (Menacée d'extinction), l'Akalat de Gunning *Sheppardia gunningi* (Quasi menacée), l'Aigle de Verreaux *Aquila verreauxi* (apparemment la première donnée pour le Mozambique du nord) et le Bruant du Cap *Emberiza capensis vincenti* (les premières données pour le pays depuis la récolte originale en 1936). La superficie de la forêt d'Inago et sa répartition altitudinale n'ont probablement jamais été très étendues, et les défrichements récents pour l'agriculture sont en train de détruire rapidement ce qui reste. L'avenir des quelques espèces forestières présentes est donc sombre.

Summary. The main findings are given of the first brief ornithological survey of Mount Inago, northern Mozambique. This massif, 50 km north-east of Mount Namuli, rises to over 1,800 m. One hundred and one species were recorded of which 86 were found on the massif itself. The most significant were Cholo Alethe *Alethe choloensis* (Endangered), East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi* (Near Threatened), Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxi* (apparently the first record for northern Mozambique) and Cape Bunting *Emberiza capensis vincenti* (the first records from the country since it was originally collected in 1936). The area and the altitudinal range of forest on Inago historically seem unlikely to have been large, while recent and continuing clearance for agriculture is rapidly eliminating what remains. The future of the relatively few forest-dependent species found therefore seems bleak.

Following a brief reconnaissance visit the previous year, in May 2009 a multi-disciplinary team of scientists made the first-ever scientific expedition to investigate the flora and fauna of Mount Inago, northern Mozambique. Arranged and led by JB, this visit was one of a series of explorations of biologically little- and unknown mountains of northern Mozambique, organised by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, with funding from the UK government's Darwin Initiative. The main ornithological results of this visit are presented here, and complement those from two of the other expeditions organised by this project which are described in Dowsett-Lemaire (2010).

Mount Inago (Serra Inago) forms part of an extensive massif of undulating, granitic domes that rise to over 1,800 m immediately south of the town of Malema (formally Entre Rios) in Nampula province, northern Mozambique, and is situated c.50 km north-east of the better known Mount Namuli (Dowsett-Lemaire 2010). Between the network of inselbergs runs a series of semi-forested valleys in which strips of riverine forest line the numerous watercourses in valley bottoms and,

in places, beside streams and gullies on the sides of the inselbergs. The riverine forest grades into mid-altitude, semi-deciduous forest in parts of the wider valley bottoms, where conditions permit (Figs. 1–3). Both forest types are under severe and increasing pressure from the local communities who are clearing them for agriculture, in places right up to the streamsides. Farmed land is, in some areas, being abandoned, at least temporarily, and is covered with 'farmbush' tangles. There are also extensive areas of tall grassland which, in some places, also occur under areas of open woodland. The inselbergs themselves are sparsely vegetated with a distinctive flora of low grassland, herbs and shrubs, several of them succulent or showing other adaptations to the harsh conditions of the open rock face. At lower altitudes there are patches of denser woodland and thicket, particularly along watercourses, while the region surrounding the massif supports savanna woodland, including miombo, now extensively degraded or completely cleared for agriculture, such that no intact areas of any size were seen.



Figures 1–3. Landscape at Mount Inago, northern Mozambique, May 2009 (Fig. 1 by Julian Bayliss, Figs. 2 and 3 by Lincoln Fishpool)

Paysage du Mont Inago, Mozambique du nord, mai 2009 (Fig. 1 de Julian Bayliss, Figs. 2 et 3 de Lincoln Fishpool)

The Mount Inago area was visited on 4–13 May 2009. The main campsite was located at 15°02'42"S 37°23'46"E, at 1,048 m in a valley bottom between two inselbergs, near the confluence of two noisy, fast-flowing streams beside which there was a very narrow strip of remnant riverine forest. The campsite itself was on abandoned cultivation, with areas of rank

secondary savanna grassland nearby; five nights were spent here. In addition, one night was spent at the 'forest campsite' (15°04'48"S 37°23'24"E, 1,478 m), at the foot of another inselberg within a relatively large forest patch, parts of which were being cleared for maize cultivation, while other parts had been cleared in the recent past.

In total, 101 species were recorded, of which 86 were found in the massif complex itself, with the remainder seen in nearby Malema town or in the wider area. Since by far the majority of these were common, widespread species whose presence was unremarkable, the full list is not presented here but appears in Bayliss *et al.* (2010) and is available upon request from the authors. However, some species worthy of comment were found and since these are, apparently, the first ornithological records from Mount Inago, they are discussed below. Further background information on Inago, details of the expedition itself and of its botanical and other zoological discoveries are also provided by Bayliss *et al.* (2010). Notable among the latter are a new species of pygmy chameleon (*Rhampholeon* sp.), butterfly (*Cymothoe* sp.), freshwater crab (*Potamonautes* sp.), and a possible new species of cycad (*Encephalartos* sp.).

Notes on selected species

Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxi*

A pair was soaring above an inselberg on 6 May. Not known from adjacent Namuli (Ryan *et al.* 1999, Dowsett-Lemaire 2008) and there seem to be no previous records from northern Mozambique (Frade 1953). It is a rare bird anywhere in the country; Parker (1999, 2005) estimated that in the south and centre of Mozambique there were 'possibly fewer than five breeding pairs' and '6 to 20 breeding pairs' respectively. No firm evidence was found on Inago of the eagle's main prey species, Rock Hyrax *Procavia capensis*. None was heard calling which, if they were present, is surprising, even allowing for the volume of noise from the stream by the campsite. Many parts of the domes were, however, littered with abundant droppings of a size and shape that suggested hyrax. Alternatively, these could have all been attributable to Smith's Red Rock Hare *Pronolagus rupestris*, which was seen on several occasions.

Silvery-cheeked Hornbill *Bycanistes brevis* /
Trumpeter Hornbill *B. bucinator*

A pair of Silvery-cheeked Hornbills was seen visiting forest remnants on three dates, whilst a pair of Trumpeter Hornbills was recorded over the main campsite twice. Records of these two hornbills are of interest because they are usually, but not always, allopatric in Malaŵi (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2006). Although not seen together on Inago, there was no obvious altitudinal or habitat separation between these observations; the Trumpeters were, however, only seen 'passing through' or along what was in effect a narrow corridor between adjacent inselbergs.

Cholo Alethe *Alethe choloensis* (Endangered)

One was trapped in a mist-net at the forest campsite. Its occurrence is notable as being one of the few Afromontane species found.

East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi* (Near Threatened)

One was seen in the forest remnant beside the stream at the main campsite; two were mist-netted at the forest campsite. Not known from adjacent Namuli (Ryan *et al.* 1999, Dowsett-Lemaire 2008), presumably because no forest now remains there at suitable altitudes.

Magpie Mannikin *Spermestes fringilloides*

Three individuals of this uncommon species were seen together on one occasion near the main campsite. It is probably relevant that stands of the bamboo *Oxytenanthera* were present in the general environs.

Cape Bunting *Emberiza capensis*

A pair was seen on an inselberg close to the main campsite on three dates. With the breast dark grey merging to brownish on the belly and just a small rufous patch on the wing-coverts, these were clearly of the race *vincenti*. Although quite widespread in suitable habitat in neighbouring Malaŵi (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2006), these appear to be the first records of *vincenti* in Mozambique since the type series was collected at Zobué on the Malaŵi border, west of Blantyre, with others from Mirrote (13°50'S 39°34'E), c.265 km north-east of Inago (Vincent 1936). This is *contra* Fry (2004) who—treating *vincenti* as a species separate from *capensis*—states that

there are records of it from Mangochi Mts. (*sic*) on both sides of the Malaŵi/Mozambique border, referencing Hall & Moreau (1970) as the source. Since, however, nothing in Hall & Moreau (1970) explicitly supports records from this part of Mozambique and as, moreover, Mangochi Mountain (singular) lies entirely within Malaŵi (F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2010), this appears to be an error.

While therefore not yet reported from adjacent Namuli or nearby Mabu (Ryan *et al.* 1999, Dowsett-Lemaire 2008, 2010), it is probably more widespread in the region, given the amount of suitable habitat.

Discussion

The discovery of East Coast Akalat on Mabu (Spottiswoode *et al.* 2008, Dowsett-Lemaire 2010) and now at Inago suggests that it may be relatively widespread in this part of Mozambique—or, rather, may have been. Given the rate of forest destruction witnessed, the future of this and other forest-dependent species, including Cholo Alethe, on Inago, is bleak. If true of other areas of remnant forest at comparable altitudes associated with a number of as yet unexplored inselbergs in the area, then Dowsett-Lemaire's (2010) assessment of the importance of the population on Mabu is correct.

The few forest-dependent species found included White-eared Barbet *Stactolaema leucotis*, Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens*, Grey-olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus cerviniventris*, Cabanis's Greenbul *P. cabanisi*, Yellow-streaked Greenbul *P. flavostriatus*, Blue-mantled Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas* and Square-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus ludwigii*. Black-headed Apalis *Apalis melanocephala*, another forest species, also occurred, sharing its habitat with Yellow-breasted Apalis *A. flavida*, the presence of which suggests (but does not eliminate the possibility) that Namuli Apalis *A. (thoracica) lynesii* does not occur on Inago, although Namuli is just c.50 km distant.

The much lower altitudes of the forest on Inago probably explain this absence. It is perhaps telling that, apart from Cholo Alethe, the only other Afromontane species recorded were Cabanis's Greenbul, Sweet Waxbill *Estrilda melanotis* and African Citril *Serinus citrinelloides*. Indeed, although this visit was so brief that it is extremely improbable that a full inventory

of the species of Inago has been made, the size, topography and altitudinal range of the massif means that the extent of forest here, particularly at higher altitudes, can never have been large, and it is therefore likely that the forest-dependent avifauna was correspondingly limited.

Such was the extent of forest destruction seen on Inago that, in truth, we were rather relieved not to find additional forest-dependent species. While Bayliss *et al.* (2010) make a number of recommendations for promoting the conservation of what forest remains, the urgency of the case, coupled with other demands for conservation effort in the region, means that the chances of them being realised, regrettably, appear remote.

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